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LETTER
TO THE
NOBILITY AND GENTRY
COMPOSING
THE COMMITTEE
FOR RAISING
THE NAVAL PILLAR,
OR
MONUMENT,

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
THE DUKE OF CLARENCE;
IN ANSWER TO
THE LETTER OF JOHN FLAXMAN, SCULPTOR, TO THE COMMITTEE
ON THAT SUBJECT.

BY ALEXANDER DUFOUR,
ARCHITECT.

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LETTER,

&c.

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,

THE letter, addressed to you by Mr. Flaxman, contains only one page, to the sentiments of which I willingly subscribe. It is the first; where, with as much justice as delicacy, he applauds you for having conceived the exalted idea of raising a Monument to the glory of our gallant Admirals; and adopted the only proper means to excite the emulation of Artists, always eager to enter the lists where justice bestows the palm.

To avoid all suspicion of partiality or cabal, you desired that the Models or Drawings should be sent in without the name of the author; a precaution which must preclude even the shadow of doubt that a name, reputation, or friends, could have the slightest influence in your choice. Nothing more noble, more generous, more encouraging! Why then has Mr. Flaxman violated, without hesitation, a regulation so judicious? What are his rights to do so? The greater they should prove, the more culpable would be his conduct. Perhaps he thought the merits of his model could not be seen with-

out the aid of a long explanation. If so, why did he not, like all the other candidates, subjoin his explanation to his model? Is it, that, anticipating the fate of his strange composition, he makes a previous appeal to the public; or, does he seek to support an extravagant idea, by the help of his reputation and the sophisms with which his letter is filled? Whatever may be his motive by that publication, he sets himself up in direct opposition to your views; he disqualifies himself as a candidate; even though his model should be superior to every other.

THE object of my letter is not to persuade you of this truth. You have too much justice and discernment not to be already convinced of it. I merely propose to answer the reasons which he assigns in support of his strange opinion. I propose to prove to the world and himself that he is mistaken in almost every thing that he has advanced. In performing this task, for the sake of method, I shall follow him step by step through the letter which he has addressed to you.

MR. FLAXMAN passes in review the different species of Monuments that can be adopted; the Obelisk, the Column, the Meta, the Triumphal Arch, the Pharos, and the Temple.

Obelisk. " THE Obelisk," says he, " deserves to be noticed first, as the simplest of the ancient Monuments that has been proposed for imitation in the present case; but it is necessary, in the imitation of ancient architecture, that its principles and characters should be preserved, because deviations from them have so seldom been attended with success. The height, then, of the Egyptian Obelisk

" Obelisk is in general about ten times the breadth of its base,
 " which being mounted on a pedestal, and plinth, the whole height
 " could not be less than twelve diameters, a proportion much too
 " slender for that strength and permanence which the Monument in
 " question should present; besides, the character of the Obelisk is
 " so simple, that no ornament seems capable of being harmoniously
 " united with it, excepting the Hieroglyphics with which it was
 " charged by the Egyptians."

ANSWER.

IF we have seldom succeeded in making fine Monuments when departing from the models of antiquity, it does not thence follow that we might not succeed, or ought not to make the attempt. Quite the contrary. The Artist of genius, who could produce any new combination of masses proper to constitute a fine Monument which should bear no resemblance to any of those known to the world, would have a better right, by a hundred times, to our admiration, than he who follows, and servilely copies, the remains of antiquity. I admit that it is very difficult, but it is this difficulty that constitutes its merit.

THE height of Obelisks varies as much as the height of Columns. That of the *Piazza di San' Pietro*, in the Vatican, the only great Obelisk to be found entire, at Rome, is eight diameters, three quarters,

THAT of *San' Giovanni Laterano*, ten diameters, three fourths.

THAT of *La Porta del Popolo*, ten.

THAT of *Santa Maria Maggiore*, eleven.

THE height of all those of inferior size, in the places or the villas of Rome, is still more various.

IT is not then true, as has been stated, that the height of Obelisks is, in general, ten diameters.

MR. FLAXMAN, in his extreme passion for antiquity, after having reduced the Artist to the necessity of adjusting an Obelisk like all those which he has seen at Rome, and which, however, as every body knows, are all placed on modern pedestals and plinths, alleges that such a mass does not present sufficient solidity; and, in support of this assertion, refers, in one of his notes *, to the Obelisks of Rome and Egypt, which have been almost all overturned. But how have they been overturned? Can he find in history a single passage that proves they fell of themselves? I challenge him to produce it.

IT is well known, that, among the Ancients, the Obelisks were

* " All the great Obelisks in Rome have been thrown down, and most of them broken to pieces: those in Egypt and Alexandria have almost universally shared the same fate, the natural consequence of their great height, in proportion to the smallness of their bases; whilst the Trajan and Antonine Columns in Rome, and the Pillar of Pompey or Severus, in Alexandria, remain standing, and entire, excepting what the second has suffered from fire, and the Pedestal of the last from the Arabs."—*Sandys's Travels*, p. 115.—*Norden, Savary, &c.*

raised upon a plinth or zocle of a very small elevation, and by this position tempted the avarice or the depravity of man. It is much more natural to think, with all judicious authors who have written upon the subject, that, in the various revolutions which succeeded the Roman Empire, these Obelisks have been thrown down, either by the barbarians who sought to destroy them, by plunderers who wished to convert them to their own use, or by persons who wished to remove them. The latter, for want of the necessary machines or proper care, overturned them in their endeavours to carry them off. The Columns of inferior size have nearly all shared the same fate. They have not been so frequently broken, because it was more easy to remove them.—The triumphal Pillars being composed of different pieces, and elevated upon high pedestals, have been respected, from the impossibility of displacing, without destroying them.

I SHOULD wish very much that John Flaxman would prove to me why an Obelisk of the same dimensions, constructed of the same materials, and upon the same principles as the Monument of London, should not be equally durable. Were this same Monument of London a single block of marble, or of granite, and should it happen to be overthrown, is he so simple as to think that it would not break just as the Obelisks have done?

MR. FLAXMAN alleges that the hieroglyphics are the only ornaments that suit an Obelisk. I shall not dispute his taste. As for my part, I have never found that these ornaments, strangely crowded one upon another, add to the beauty of the Obelisk. I ask him, whether

whether that of the *Piazza di San' Pietro*, at Rome, appears less beautiful, because not charged with ornaments, the meaning of which we do not understand? If he will recollect the Obelisk of the *Piazza Navonna*, at Rome, he will see that Bernini has contrived to raise one, without placing it merely on a pedestal and a plinth. If he will further recollect the little modern Obelisk raised in the *Villa Albani*, he will be also convinced that an Obelisk may be adorned without having recourse to Egyptian characters.

My Lords and Gentlemen, I beg pardon for having dwelt so much on this article; but as Mr. Flaxman, after having observed that this species of Monument seemed to draw most suffrages in its favour, has endeavoured to combat it more than any other, I thought it my duty, for the same reason, to follow the same plan in its defence.

Triumphal
Arch.

" THE triumphal Arch has been also thought on, which is an
 " idea both elegant and classical ; but which, however, is liable to
 " two objections :—First, that it cannot well be covered with bas-
 " relieves, representing the engagements it is intended to celebrate,
 " like the ancient Arches, because sculpture does not represent
 " shipping with effect, and our great victories are Naval ; but
 " chiefly because the Arch, consistently with a beautiful propor-
 " tion, cannot be raised sufficiently high to make a distant stately
 " object."

ANSWER.

BAS-RELIEVES, from their small projection, suit extremely well in Architecture. They ought to be subordinate to it. They should adorn without injuring it. They are not intended for a distant view; and I see no reason why bas-relieves, representing shipping, if well designed, well executed, and properly placed, should not produce a good effect.

If Mr. Flaxman is determined to make a Figure, 150 feet high, why will he refuse to Architects the pleasure of constructing a triumphal Arch of 200? One would suppose, if any body has a right "to build castles in the air," this right belongs of preference to the Architect.

" THE Column, at the same time that it is equal in classical The Column
 " authority and beauty to either of the former, has several advan-
 " tages over them: its form is fitted to become a high and striking
 " distant object, like the Obelisk, with a greater bulk and firmness;
 " it is more simple than the Arch; and it is, besides, capable of
 " being surmounted, surrounded, and defended, by such statues,
 " trophies, and architectural forms, as the Portraits of the Heroes,
 " the Spoils of the Vanquished, and the Records of the national
 " Prowess, require; thus making one great harmonious and mag-
 " nificent composition."

ANSWER.

AT length, Mr. Flaxman concedes to us triumphal Pillars. We perfectly agree with him in every thing that he has said upon that subject, except his position, that they present a greater "bulk and firmness" than the Obelisk. We now proceed to prove the contrary,

SUPPOSE a triumphal Pillar, and an Obelisk of the same dimensions, same height, and in the same light, and the spectator contemplating both objects each in its centre, and from the same distance, we admit that the semicircle of the triumphal Pillar, visible to the eye, will have a greater surface than the face of the Obelisk; but this surface will be seen in perspective, and consequently will lose its natural bulk as it recedes from the central point, while the face of the Obelisk will remain always the same. If we further consider the different degrees of light and shade that will fall upon the triumphal Pillar, while the light will remain constantly the same upon the Obelisk, it will be obvious to all who have studied nature, that the Pillar must appear more slender than the Obelisk. But we shall not press this argument. We shall grant the solution to be even doubtful. Let us now change the position of the spectator, and place him so, that these two objects shall be seen angularly. It will then be evident, that the Pillar must always present the same surface, while the two faces perceived of the Obelisk will offer a larger mass; and a mass the more definite, as one of the two faces will be entirely in the light, and the other entirely in the shade. It is for this reason, I have often remarked, with English Artists, that the little Obelisk in St. George's Fields produces a much greater effect, than a Pillar of the same height could have in its place.—Mr. Flaxman has therefore been mistaken, when he advanced, that a triumphal Pillar would present a "greater bulk and "firmness" than the Obelisk.

I CANNOT conceive why, after having spoken of the Obelisk, he should propose the META, which is nothing but a small ornamented Obelisk, placed by the Ancients at the two circular extremities of the *Spina*, in their Circus's, to mark its centre. These

The Meta.

species

species of Obelisks do not derive their name from their figure, but from their situation, and the use to which they were applied; and prove, contrary to the opinion of Mr. Flaxman, that the Ancients thought they could adorn them without hieroglyphics.

WITH respect to Temples, as, since the time of the Greeks and Romans, none have been raised to great men, he might have dispensed with mentioning them. We agree with him, that the Pharos would not produce as fine an effect as a triumphal Pillar; and we add, that such a structure would have no more relation to the object in question, than any other public edifice whatever.

AFTER having spoken of these different kinds of Monuments, and endeavoured to indispose the Committee to adopt them, Mr. Flaxman gives some drawings of them, which, it must be confessed, are well calculated to advance his purpose. What would the world say of an orator in the House of Commons, who, in supporting his opinion, should only notice the worst arguments that could be urged against it, though perfectly convinced that there were stronger in being? In giving such drawings, Mr. Flaxman seems to think, he was tracing with his chisel some slight and incorrect lines of Architecture, in the distant part of one of his bas-reliefs *. It is impossible to conceive any thing from his first moulding, for I do not know any other name to give to that on which his Obelisk appears to stand.

WHEN all Artists regard the Trajan Pillar as the model of all triumphal Pillars, why does he affect to seek in a small antique medal a very bad sketch, which no more resembles the Pillar of

Temples,

See Mr.
Flaxman's
triumphal
Column.

Antonine, that a bad Gothic figure resembles the finest Grecian statue.

See his triumphal Arch,
his Pharos,
and his Temple.

EVERY body knows that the ornaments, bas-relieves, and inscriptions, constitute an essential part of the triumphal Arches; and that, to divest them of these, is to reduce them to the class of ordinary Arches. How then does he presume to give us this skeleton of Architecture; for the rich and elegant Arch of Titus? Was he at least to adduce an Pharos more elegant than that which he has presented; and does his poor and little Temple of Pestum bring to the recollection of travellers the noble and imposing masses of the kingdom of Naples?

My Lords and Gentlemen, It will not escape your observation; that, after he thinks he has sufficiently prepared you against the adoption of the different sorts of Monuments, of which he has given such bad drawings, he concludes with proposing a colossal Figure of 100 feet high. Ah! John Flaxman, why did you not say at once that you were a sculptor? We should then have understood you, and applauded so grand a speculation.

I do not dispute that some colossal Statues have existed, but I deny that their number ever was so considerable as he would have us think. Had this been the case, we should have discovered more of their ruins. But if they did exist in such number, do not the few remains, that we now see of them, furnish the strongest possible argument against their adoption? I admit with all the world the talents of Pliny, but I also know that he was credulous, superstitious, fond of the marvellous, and apt to indulge these propensities in his writings.

See Mr.
Cotton's
Annotations
upon
Athenae.

See Mr. Lister. *

My

My Lords and Gentlemen, as John Flaxman, Sculptor, has had the goodness to give you some rules for judging the Drawings of Architecture which shall be presented to you, I, Architect, shall take the liberty of delivering my opinion upon the model which he offers to the public.

Its first defect is the want of any character of a Naval Monument; for the little boats in bas-relief, on which are placed the species of ghosts that crown the busts of the Admirals, can produce no effect at the distance necessary for viewing his Monument. The four *bornes* or studs, at the angles of his steps, and of which he has taken the idea from his antique medal, seem as if placed there by chance. They answer no object of utility; and the square steps which lose themselves in these circular figures, would produce a very bad effect. His pedestal is heavy; its parts are too equal, and do not, besides, afford four places, well marked, to receive the four inscriptions which are absolutely necessary. His Figure is too short; the right arm is badly designed, and the fantastical helmet with which it is set off, gives to it, at first sight, the look of an Egyptian figure.

WERE his Monument a proper one, I should applaud his idea of placing it on Greenwich Hill, opposite the centre of the Hospital; but such a Figure would overpower and make an edifice, at present possessed of so much magnificence, appear to a disadvantage. Of this truth he seems to be perfectly aware himself; for after having told us he placed it upon the summit of the hill, in his drawing he represents it at the bottom.

MR. FLAXMAN endeavours to persuade us, that a colossal Figure exhibits "more magnificence, power, skill, and surprise," than a

Figure of ordinary size. This is a proposition that involves him in a question which he will find it difficult to support by citations from Pliny, Pausanias, &c. He should have reflected, studied Nature and the heart of man philosophically, and be able to draw his arguments from his own reflections.

AN Artist may raise an immense Column, and yet please ; for whatever some Architects may assert, a Column is not an imitation of Nature ; but in the imitative Arts, such as Painting and Sculpture, every thing that outsteps Nature too far, surprises without pleasing us. Nature herself, when she trespasses beyond her ordinary limits, particularly in the human species, has something that disgusts, as our surprise begins to abate. The giants, even the best proportioned, astonish us for the moment, but end with fatiguing the eye. So with Statues, those which have for ages enjoyed the greatest reputation, are not colossal. These are, the Apollo, the Venus de Medicis, the Gladiator, the Laocoön, &c. All these approach, or only exceed in a small degree, human nature. I say more. Any ordinary Sculptor can execute a colossal Statue, in which every thing is exaggerated, *outré*, and shewn only in mass ; but none except a Sculptor of genius, can express in a Statue of the common size, the forms and the passions of human nature. In a colossal Statue, after the composition, all the rest is rather the business of the Masons than the Sculptor. From thence it follows, that these species of works are not calculated to transmit to posterity the merit of the Artists of a nation. They afford only an idea of its riches.

MR. FLAXMAN, true always in his language to his profession of a Sculptor, “ considers how much more sentiment and interest there “ is in a fine human Figure than can possibly be produced in the “ choicest piece of Architecture,”

IT is certain that if we wished to represent the portrait, the figure, or any memorable exploit of a hero, a Statue would answer the intent better than a Pillar, or an Obelisk. This is too evident for argument. But if we wished to perpetuate his memory, a piece of Architecture is better calculated for the purpose than a Statue. It is the *Colisse*, which now gives us an idea of the Roman grandeur. It is to the Pillars of Trajan, Antoninus, Pompey, the triumphal Arches of Constantine, Titus, and their inscriptions, which have survived so many ages, that we are indebted for the memory of these great men; while their Statues, even colossal, of gold, silver, ivory, ebony, and marble, as Mr. Flaxman, or his friend Pliny, would have them, have been almost all despoiled, melted down, burned, mutilated, or broken. The few of them that remain are in such a state as to leave Antiquaries themselves doubtful with respect to the great men whom they were intended to represent. It is therefore certain, that a Monument of Architecture in which the talents of different Artists must necessarily combine, is more durable and more proper than a Statue, to transmit to posterity the talents, the bravery, and the riches that distinguish the English nation. This position, I flatter myself, I have sufficiently established; and therefore shall not trespass on your time by urging any further arguments in its support, though I could adduce many.

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,

IN my answer to Mr. Flaxman, neither animosity, jealousy, nor interest, have had the slightest influence on my pen. I respect his talents, and above all the reputation which he enjoys in this country. But he has endeavoured to induce you to adopt a colossal Statue, in preference to an architectural Monument. I am an Architect, and have ventured to plead the cause of my profession. Whether I have succeeded, is for you and the public to judge.

I KNOW very well that his letter can mislead none but those who are destitute of taste and knowledge, and will have no effect upon judges so respectable, so enlightened, as you. The well-informed public are perfectly convinced, that among the Drawings and Models which will be submitted to you, you will not be seduced by the illusions of a specious drawing, or a captivating explanation; that you will pay no regard to the names of Monuments, but that you will select those, which, to a noble simplicity of composition and appropriate character, shall join the rare merit of novelty, those which to that of invention shall unite the long and difficult study of plans and sections; in fine, those, which to all these qualities shall add the desirable advantage of involving you in the least possible expense in the execution of such a Monument.

Yours very truly & sincerely,

I have the honour to be,
My LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,

Your most obedient, respectful Servant,
ALEXANDER DUFOUR.

